

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1           1. A method of confining a commodity in a compo-  
2 site container having a plurality of constituents, com-  
3 prising the steps of:

4           assembling the constituents into the container  
5 around the commodity;

6           providing at least some of the constituents with  
7 characteristic indicia not later than in the course of  
8 the assembling step;

9           processing the characteristic indicia into informa-  
10 tion which is characteristic of the assembled container;  
11 and

12           encoding the information upon at least one consti-  
13 tuent of the container.

1           2. The method of claim 1, wherein said providing  
2       step includes randomly selecting at least one of the  
3       characteristic indicia.

1           3. The method of claim 1, wherein said providing  
2       step includes applying all of the characteristic indicia  
3       to the respective constituents prior to the assembling  
4       step.

1           4. The method of claim 1, wherein said encoding  
2       step is carried out subsequent to said assembling step.

1           5. The method of claim 1, wherein said providing  
2       step includes applying at least one of the  
3       characteristic indicia to the respective constituent  
4       of the container in the course of said assembling step.

1           6. The method of claim 1, wherein said encoding  
2       step includes applying the information to the at least  
3       one constituent upon completion of said assembling step.



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1           10.    The method of claim 9, wherein said  
2 assembling step includes confining the commodity in the  
3 inner envelope, thereupon applying the insert around  
4 a selected part of the inner envelope, thereafter  
5 confining the inner envelope and the insert in the outer  
6 envelope, and thereafter applying the outermost  
7 envelope, with the tear strip thereon, around the outer  
8 envelope.

1           11.    The method of claim 1, wherein said  
2 assembling step includes advancing the commodity along  
3 a predetermined path and draping the constituents of  
4 the container around the advancing commodity in a prede-  
5 termined sequence in successive portions of said path.

1           12.    The method of claim 1, further comprising  
2 the step of processing into said information data per-  
3 taining to at least one of (a) the commodity and (b)  
4 the container.

1           13. The method of claim 12, wherein said data  
2     denote at least one of the time of the assembling step,  
3     the location of the assembling step and at least one  
4     person in charge of the assembling step.

1           14. The method of claim 1, wherein said encoding  
2     step includes visibly applying said information to an  
3     exposed part of at least one constituent of the  
4     assembled container.

1           15. Apparatus for confining successive ones of  
2 a series of commodities in composite containers each  
3 of which has a set of constituents, comprising:

4           means for conveying successive commodities of the  
5 series along a predetermined path;

6           means for assembling the constituents of the sets  
7 into containers, including placing the constituents  
8 around successive commodities in a predetermined sequence  
9 in successive portions of the path;

10          means for providing at least some constituents  
11 of each set with characteristic indicia not later than  
12 in the respective portions of said path;

13          means for processing the characteristic indicia  
14 on said at least some constituents of each set into in-  
15 formation which is characteristic of the respective as-  
16 sembled containers; and

17          means for encoding the information upon the res-  
18 pective containers.

1           16. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein at least  
2           some of the characteristic indicia are randomly selected  
3           indicia.

1           17. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said  
2           assembling means comprises a cigarette packing machine.

1           18. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said means  
2           for providing includes at least one laser.

1           19. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said means  
2           for providing includes at least one printer.

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1           20. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the consti-  
2   tuents of each set include a first blank for conversion  
3   into an inner envelope of a container, a second blank  
4   for conversion into an outer envelope of a container,  
5   a third blank for conversion into an outermost envelope  
6   of a container and an insert for conversion into a  
7   collar between the inner and outer envelopes of a con-  
8   tainer, said providing means including a first laser  
9   for the application of indicia to first blanks, a second  
10   laser for the application of indicia to second blanks,  
11   a first printer for the application of indicia to  
12   inserts and a second printer for the application of in-  
13   dicia to third blanks, said means for encoding including  
14   a laser.

1           21. The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the  
2   constituents of each set further include a tear strip  
3   borne by the respective third blank, said second printer  
4   being arranged to apply indicia to the tear strips.

1           22. The apparatus of claim 20, further comprising  
2   additional conveying means for delivering the blanks  
3   and the inserts to the respective portions of said path.